

## Against the Grain

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# The Self-Publishing Phenomenon

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# Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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## The Self-Publishing Phenomenon

by **Bob Holley** (Professor, Library & Information Science, Wayne State University)  
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I became aware of the increasing importance of self-publishing a few years ago while listening to a **National Public Radio** interview on my way home from work. The woman, a successful self-published author, was giving hints on how to market these works. Almost as an aside, she contended that of the one million titles published in the previous year approximately 750,000 were self-published. I haven't been able to verify this figure for this introduction and have found contradictory evidence that, "according to **Bowker's** newest figures of books produced, last year there were 211,269 self-published titles (based on ISBNs) released, up from 133,036 in 2010." (<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/pw-select/article/52216-bea-2012-self-published-titles-topped-211-000-in-2011.html>) Nonetheless, I've been somewhat surprised that I hadn't encountered more discussion of this increasingly important topic.

This special segment of *Against the Grain* will partially fill this gap as it includes commentary from many different players in the publishing world. Authors, publishers, vendors, and librarians recount their experiences with both fiction and non-fiction self-publishing. The special segment also includes a bibliographic essay by **Joe Grobelny**. With the exception of **John Riley**, a self-published author and friend for many years, I recruited the contributors from postings on multiple discussion lists. **Walt Crawford**, one of the profession's most prolific authors, and **Donald Beagle**, an author of three very different books, share their varying experiences with both traditional and self-publishing. **Julia Glassman** tells how she founded her own small press after receiving a mailbag full of rejection letters from publishers. **Rory Litwin** of **Litwin Books** argues for the relevance of publishers in terms of their added value

vis-à-vis self-publishing. **Bob Nardini** and **Janice Schnell** provide a vendor perspective.

A chance meeting helped me fill in one missing piece — the selection process for self-published materials in public libraries. I was presenting at a workshop where **Matt Pacer** talked a bit about this topic and then agreed to be a contributor to the volume. I would have also liked to have had the perspective of a large research library with comprehensive Conspectus Level 5 collecting goals in areas where potentially valuable self-published material exists, but no one volunteered. Perhaps a librarian with relevant experience will read this introduction and someday write a piece for *Against the Grain*.

From having read the contributions multiple times as editor, I came away with the follow-

*continued on page 12*

## If Rumors Were Horses

Happy spring! Much to report in this issue which, among many other things, talks about self-publishing in the academic space. Y'all probably know this already — but — did you know that **Pat Conroy's** first book, *The Boo*, was self-published way back when we didn't have a lot of self-publishing going on. Boy, has the landscape changed! Now we have this guest edited issue by the cracker-jack **Bob Holley** full of great papers about self-publishing. And we are even planning a **preconference** in **Charleston 2013** about self-publishing.

Continuing in the self-publishing vein, I just saw an interview on Fox news with the vigorous

**Jim McGinty** about his book *Right to Kill: A Brooklyn Tale*. It's about Vietnam, has romance, street smart characters, gritty combat, and brutal murder with even a touch of humor. What an interview! I went right out and downloaded the book on my iPad!

[http://www.amazon.com/Right-Kill-Brooklyn-Tale-ebook/dp/B00ARAQS86/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1369954195&sr=1-1&keywords=right+to+kill+a+brooklyn+tale](http://www.amazon.com/Right-Kill-Brooklyn-Tale-ebook/dp/B00ARAQS86/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1369954195&sr=1-1&keywords=right+to+kill+a+brooklyn+tale)

And I am sure that you will remember that **Jim** is currently vice chairman of **Cambridge Information Group** which owns **ProQuest**.

And just heard that **ProQuest** has completed its acquisition of **EBL** (Ebook Library). **Kari Paulson**, President of **EBL**, and **EBL's** current staff have joined

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**Anthony Watkinson** reading to his grandson. It's never too early to enjoy a good book!

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## The Self-Publishing Phenomenon from page 1

ing conclusions. The decision to self-publish or not depends upon the nature of the materials as well as the goals and skills of the author. Self-publishing may be the only option for niche materials without a large enough sales potential to interest a commercial press. The author may choose self-publishing to have full control of the material or if the author's reputation is sufficient to assure the desired level of sales. The physical or digital quality of the publication is no longer a significant factor because self-published works can look as good or even better than those from commercial publishers (though, for varying reasons, they often don't). Several companies sell services to authors for both print and digital materials that publishers normally provide such as copy editing and choice of art work, but several writers advise against these services because of the additional cost. Several writers assert that the main advantage of commercial publishing is marketing and sales. Publishers know how to manage marketing campaigns and get their publications included in the national network of bibliographic control so that they are more likely to receive reviews and be included in approval plans and blanket orders. Nonetheless, self-publishing can generate reasonable sales and be the first step toward commercial publishing as was the case with *Fifty Shades of Grey*. At another conference, I had the owner of a printing firm tell me that two of the self-published authors who use his services had become millionaires.

My final comment is that companies like **Amazon** are luring authors to self-publish with them in digital, print, and audio. **Amazon** can offer higher royalties since the middleman, the publisher, is eliminated. **Amazon** and the other online book vendors also don't have any limit to the number of items they stock as did bookstores and can therefore benefit from the long tail.

In conclusion, I am of the opinion that academic and public libraries will be forced to develop collection development policies that take into account self-published materials or they will run the risk of not providing needed materials to their patrons. 🐾

## Bet You Missed It

### Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

Column Editor: **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

**Editor's Note:** Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to *Against the Grain's* attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — **KS**

#### AN AUTHOR'S TRASH IS GOLD by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

And it's not just an author's scribbles and rewritten manuscripts that are of value. **Tim Leary's** Nintendo Power Glove is preserved by the NY Public Library. **Norman Mailer's** bar mitzvah speech can be found at UT-Austin.



The prices? **Woodward** and **Bernstein** sold 83 Watergate boxes for \$5 million. **Norman Mailer** got \$2.5 million for 1,062 boxes of whatever.

And even with digitization, there is value. Poet of light verse, **Wendy Cope**, made a recent sale to the **British Library**: 40,000 emails for \$50,000.

See — **Barry Newman**, "As Trash Goes, Author's Clutter In the Right Hands Is Very Bankable," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 3, 2013, p.A1.

#### MUSICIANS AMONG US by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Let's read about the musician in society. (1) **Arthur Loesser**, *Men, Women and Pianos* (1954) (European & American social history via the piano); (2) **Ralph Ellison**, *Living With Music* (2001) (high-ballin' trains and lonesome guitar chords — delving into history of jazz); (3) **Thomas Mann**, *Dr. Faustus* (1947) (Faustian spin on musical mind of Arnold Schoenberg — the artist as "other"); (4) **Dimitri Shostakovich & Solomon Volkov**, *Testimony* (1947) (composer trapped in confines of Soviet desolation); (5) **Bruce Chatwin**, *The Songlines* (1987) (Aboriginal beliefs on totemic beings who sang the earth into life — those on "walkabout" are on a spiritual journey recreating creation).

See — **Stuart Isacoff**, "Five Best," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 23-24, 2013, p.C10. **Isacoff** is the author of *A Natural History of the Piano* (Knopf).